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**Stephen Schloesser**, *Jazz Age Catholicism: Mystic Modernism in Postwar Paris, 1919-1933*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005. xi + 449 pp. Notes and index. \$85.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8020-8718-3.

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*Jazz Age Catholicism* dramatizes major changes that took place in French cultural life after World War I, although the author pushes his references back to the Second Empire (1852-70): "In 1864, Catholicism had been defined as irreducibly anti-modernist; in 1926, it actively sought out the avant-garde. How was this possible?" (p. 4). How did the neo-Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, his circle, and other Catholic intellectuals and artists succeed in putting their experience of Catholicism at the center of French cultural discourse? The re-conceptualizing, the re-experiencing of Catholicism, came from both happenstance and design, with World War One the awful happenstance, of course, and the design resulting from "the revivalists' skillful retooling--to suit their own modernist program--of three traditional Catholic ideas: hylomorphism, sacramentalism, and transubstantiation" (p. 6). Hylomorphism is the old Aristotelian/Thomistic teaching that all reality is made up of prime matter and substantial form--the broadest possible way of picturing the reality of this world; sacramentalism valorizes awareness that an outward sign represents inner reality; and transubstantiation was/is the term used for the eucharistic transformation of earthly into divine substance.

With standard late scholastic theological fare at their disposal, "Catholic revivalists could re-imagine the relationship between religion and culture. Catholicism and 'modern civilization'--eternal and avant-garde, grace and grotesque, mystical and dissonant--could now be seen in categories other than simple competition: form actualizing matter, grace perfecting nature, substance underlying surface" (p. 7). The author would have us believe that this re-imagining found its essential conditions for development in the so-called Jazz Age, and the book is a presentation of four re-imagining individuals: Maritain, of course, but also the painter Georges Rouault, the novelist Georges Bernanos, and the composer and organist, Charles Tournemire. Schloesser shows them in the World War One setting and in their own disciplinary spheres, with emphasis on the the critical reception of their works. Supposedly we have in Rouault, Bernanos, and Tournemire, but also in the entire cloud of Catholic high-culture witnesses, the battle of modernity against itself: it is their kind of modernism against the modernism of dadaism, surrealism, socialist and magical realism, and fascism.

Well, how about "Jazz Age" as a label for it all? And what about "modernism"? Is there any possibility of using *that* label with precision or do we risk sinking into expository quicksand? Are hylomorphism, sacramentalism, and transubstantiation really useful here as guiding--even explanatory--concepts? Do they in any way enable an explanation of what our Catholic cultural innovators were about? [1]

Testing "Jazz Age" in a book review to see if it is a fanciful label or a metaphor or even some kind of genus (make that "Jazz Age Culture," then) to specific species of art, literature, and music, may just be too solemn an enterprise. Four years ago in *Jazz Modernism*, Alfred Appel, Jr. presented Joyce and Hemingway, Picasso and Matisse, as literary and artistic expressions of the jazz music of Ellington, Armstrong, Waller, Holiday, and others. [2] But whereas Appel, a literary critic, eschews any attempt to do something with "modernism," believing that somehow that the *gestalt* of Jazz (improvisational and accessible) conveys what he means, Schloesser wants to distinguish "modernization," "modernity," and "modernism" and interpret them in his own way, saying, for example, that "modernism" is "modernity against itself" (p. 16). Of course, if we take the root "modern" to refer to enlightenment rationalism and

the industrialization beginning in the nineteenth century, we can nail down “modernization” as the activity, “modernity” as the condition, and “modernism” as the cultural stance or interpretation.[3] Such simple sorting out is not for Schloesser, who has constructed a succession of interpretative grids, risking a primary emphasis on his conceptual apparatus. But his personalities, their work, and its connection to their affirmation of Catholicism do get priority, because he does not hold himself—or subject his readers—to the consistency of a philosophical treatise. This may be a good thing, but the end result is that the metaphor of Jazz moves wraithlike across the text, and the organizing concepts of hylomorphism, sacramentalism, and transubstantiation suffer a number of identity changes.

Schloesser cuts to the chase in the nineteenth century when, after a brief look at Charcot, Zola, and Lévy-Bruhl, he has at ultramontanism, the super-papal Catholicism that had triumphed by mid-century.[4] He sets up nineteenth-century ultramontane Catholicism as a point of comparison for his twentieth-century Jazz Catholicism. “As a trans-national outsider symbolically centred in the Roman Pope, nineteenth-century Catholicism did not see itself as a culturally central player, synthesizing and transforming elements of that culture. More often than not it saw itself as besieged, its eternalist values competing with hegemonic modernity” (p. 28). However, with the nostalgia for Byzantine art, Gregorian chant, and the pipe organ, and the revival of scholasticism, with the passion for the fantastic and the psychical in specific circles, and with the valorizing of some hysterical experiences as the heights of religious experience—with all of this, the context was set for a new, high intellectual and high cultural interpretation of Catholicism. The political setting, of course, was the Dreyfus affair and the ascendancy of Émile Combes and Charles Maurras.

*Jazz Age Catholicism* contains one of the best accounts available of rise of Jacques Maritain as an intellectual and cultural leader of a young *public cultivé*: first, in his relationship with Henri Bergson, Léon Bloy, and Ernest Psichari, and, secondly, in his developing conviction that the French needed to be reconciled to the Catholicism that constituted their essence.[5] Here, he made the spiritual journey with his friend and future wife, Raïssa, but also with other Catholic spokesmen and leaders, such as Charles Péguy and Alfred (the future Cardinal) Baudrillart. “Mystic realism” is Schloesser’s label for the Catholicism that ensued: something beyond the formal memorials, monuments and commemorations, put together after the war, beyond the dialectical realism associated with André Breton and Walter Benjamin. It was a new kind of synthesis: “Like surrealism, magical realism, and synthetic realism, a postwar ‘Christian’ or ‘mystic’ realism dialectically synthesized what was given and what was desired” (p. 119). Raïssa urged “no timidity, no prudery, and no Manichaeism”; Jacques edited *The Universal Review*, the goal being to bring Thomism to a wider culture. Readers will need to note that now “realism” is brought up to replace “modernism” after the “mystic [modernism]” introduced in the subtitle: more than wordplay, the use of “realism” here covers the cultural *engagement* of the group, rather than its general orientation. Hence, the importance for Schloesser of the *La Revue des Jeunes*, a journal of the ideas and goals of young intellectual Catholics with Antonin Sertillanges (not mentioned in the book) as perhaps the basic animating figure. A principal goal was reconciliation with the soul of the past while striving for a better future. Similarly, Schloesser brings *palingenesis* to the fore, an old concept, conveying the idea of new birth/regeneration, that was reframed in the early nineteenth century by Pierre-Simon Ballanche (not mentioned in the book). In the writings of the constitutional bishop Henri Grégoire and in Ballanche, regeneration was essential to a revolutionary and post-revolutionary era.[6] Small wonder that some overly self-conscious Catholic intellectuals of the 1920s and 30s would retrieve the dramatic label for their *renouveau catholique*.

There are two chapters on the Maritains and Cultural Hylomorphism, with—once again in control—the Aristotelian-Thomistic matter and form that Schloesser believes Maritain foregrounded at all times. The problem is that prime matter in the most abstract sense is pure potency, not just the material out of which something is fashioned. There is also a problem when Schloesser says of Maritain’s *Art and*

*Scholasticism*: “The work’s title nicely summarized Maritain’s appeal to a culture in chaos: the reconciliation of former foes. To a ‘realist generation,’ he offered three tantalizing propositions: first, privileged and infallible access to what is real: that is, certain, unchanging, and eternal forms. Second, he showed that what is real not only *could* but even *ought to be* clothed in avant-garde matter, the most modern Jazz Age productions” (pp. 141-142). Now Maritain and Schloesser are *clothing* form in matter, whereas the classically expressed formulations have form and matter together perceptible in “accidents.” Here Schloesser highlights the recourse to “eternal forms” found in the “neo-classicism” of Jean Cocteau—Maritain’s angelic artist wrapped in a sexually enigmatic personality. But then we are steered back to Maritain and hylomorphism: “Having established that for both Aristotle and Aquinas the true form is the invisible form, Maritain could now repudiate representational art of every kind and simultaneously reconcile the most abstract of modern art with the most ancient of Catholic texts” (p. 149). *Art and Scholasticism* coordinated, then, Catholic metaphysics with postwar avant-garde culture, comparing the artist to a geometer, a monk, a warrior. “Maritain’s Catholicism could reconcile these seeming opposites because he applied his hylomorphic conception of reality to culture itself, Catholicism could universally accommodate any form of cultural representation whatsoever precisely because it was a broader application of the more limited principle of art: it did not demand imitation of a ‘shape’ limiting it to a particular culture and historical location. . . .” (p. 161). Here the notion—I would call it a sophism—adopted by Maritain came from a *Revue thomiste* article of 1921. “It is not Catholicism which is Thomist, but rather Thomism which is catholic: and it is Catholic because it is universalist” (p. 168) For Maritain, such principles did not belong specifically to the Middle Ages; medieval revival here would be retrieval of an inner spirit or principle that belongs to all ages. Either Maritain or Schloesser, or both, have turned hylomorphism into a label that loosely collects or coordinates a variety of spiritual interiors and material exteriors; this is verbal but not necessarily philosophical dexterity.[7]

Hylomorphism morphs into sacramentalism in that the substantial form of a sacrament is actually the inner reality (divine presence) of the sacrament. The extension and visibility of this sacramental grace comes from the “accidents” of quality, quantity, color, etc. The ultimate example of this is the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ: the substance of bread and wine is changed into Christ but the accidents of bread and wine remain. Schloesser has a Maritain whose philosophical work represents a *reversal* of this relationship: the substance of Aristotelian-Thomistic perennial reality remains while its accidents or outward appearances change. But then, Schloesser gets to turn the whole thing around again! “By the end of the postwar decade, sacramental modernism had changed the meaning of both ‘Catholic’ and ‘modern,’ not just accidentally but substantially. *Less bal masqué*, more *missa brevis*, this Jazz Age dramaturgy resembled nothing so much as transubstantiation. All tables were holy” (p. 209). Whoa there! I doubt that even Thomas Aquinas would recognize substance and accidents any more, although the rotund Dominican might have liked the idea that “all tables were holy”!

Those famous friendships of Maritain with the leading intellectuals of his era were certainly fraught relationships. With Jean Cocteau, Maurice Sachs, and Max Jacob, the air was electric with renounced, but not altered homosexuality—all of this to the homophobic disgust of Georges Bernanos: “I wonder by what disgrace, by what curse the Catholic intelligentsia has been so reduced, that in order to instruct its flock, it should find its nourishment among the disciples of Bergson and Cocteau, wearing the clownish whiteface of Thomists [*grimés en thomistes*]? ... Cocteau, the conversion of Cocteau and his little ‘fairies’ from *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*; come now, is this what they call the Catholic Revival?” (p. 186) Maritain, of course, was simply trying to promote complete control, sacrifice of the sexual drive in the interest of love.[8] However, given that Maritain was wont to use Luther, Descartes, and Rousseau as whipping boys, one might well be disoriented by his attempts to exonerate the crew so irascibly disdained by Bernanos.

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As war broke out in Europe, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain were in Canada. They decided not to return to France in 1940 because of Raïssa's Jewish origins, but moved rather to the United States where Jacques taught at Princeton and Columbia, and transmitted BBC radio messages to France. In 1942, he went so far as to say that "France's soul is cast into a state of mortal sin," chiefly because of its cruelty to "the women and men who have the honor of belonging to Jesus Christ's own people" (p. 208). This was the most dramatic manifestation of a pro-Jewish stance that, back in 1937, had gained him the antagonism of the conservative Thomist, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, and Georges Bernanos. His overtures to the humanistic and existentialist movements of the extreme left, as well as his relationships with anarchists like Saul Alinsky and Dorothy Day, led right-wing critics to call him a 'Christian Marxist.' Because Maritain refused to recognize Franco's war as a religious crusade, some in the Catholic press and institutions were hostile to him. A visit to the American University of Notre Dame in Indiana caused an uproar and left some in doubt about Maritain's orthodoxy. Of course, with all of this we are beyond Schloesser's cut-off date of 1933.

Georges Rouault, Georges Bernanos, and Charles Tournemire were three basic incarnations of mystic modernism. The Rouault chapter, "Masked Redemption," briefly presents the artist's clowns and prostitutes as figures of redemption, appreciated by Maritain but not by Maritain's erstwhile mentor, the erotic and somewhat sado-masochistic Léon Bloy, who had originally led Rouault to abandon the "dandified" ways of the symbolists. With Schloesser's Rouault, we have the first of three installments on critical reaction to the master's cultural achievement; critics step up in straightforward chronological order. In Rouault's case, we have mostly critical reaction; we "hear" him very little, and we have the considerable deprivation of not being able to see him. Those of us who are Rouault enthusiasts need to have before us the clowns, the prostitutes, and above all the portrayals of suffering in the *Miserere et Guerre* series of lithographs to appreciate the "masked redemption" painted by the master. Let us here register a complaint about, or to, the publisher that the decision to omit illustrations was unfortunate.

Georges Bernanos's *Sous le soleil de Satan* is the centerpiece of the chapter, "Passionate Supernaturalism." It is the story of a pregnant sixteen-year-old girl, her murder of a lover, the local Marquis, and consequent tribulations of a priest of the region, Father Donissan. The latter's life and ministry is confounded by his attempts to save the girl from a sordid life and, in a later drama, by his attempts to pray a child out of fatal sickness. In between times he is committed briefly to an asylum and then spends five years in a Trappist monastery. There hovers over his worst moments a satanic presence in the form of peasant crudity and mocking voices. Bernanos was always a master of pairing the most delicate of priestly psyches with the most devastating of human encounters, and so Schloesser's use of critical response is especially pertinent here. For the critics, Bernanos's work, derived from the symbolism and decadence of Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, was almost devoid of hope—and so, of faith and charity also. Critics found an irreconcilable conflict between the realist and the visionary, and reproached him for allowing the power of Satan to eclipse reality and grace. But *La Revue des Jeunes*, ever inclusive of Catholic intellectuals, published a reviewer who prayed "that this hope [somehow found in Bernanos's priest] remain with us who are assisting—accompanied by a jazz band—at the atrocious end of the world" (p. 260). There goes that Jazz wraith again.

Charles Tournemire was a composer who combined cultural immersion in Gregorian chant with political engagement on the Catholic right, a not altogether unusual combination for France at the turn of the century. This experience resulted in an *oeuvre* that refashioned the revived and safe liturgical expression of the chant into original musical expression (the chapter title is "Mystical Dissonance"). His *Orgue glorieux* and *Orgue mystique* were designed to accompany—serve as background—to "low" masses (otherwise without music) celebrated across the liturgical year. Grounded in Gregorian chant, these compositions—excepting a few complaints about chromaticism—were very well received in Catholic liturgical circles. Schloesser, having pointed out the connection of the chant revival to ultramontanism, finds that Tournemire's "ultramodern musical language" (p. 322) was a reversal of the aesthetics of

ultramodernism and, more importantly, an expression of personal hope and account taken of the important reversals he suffered in his professional musical career. Broad hope here certainly trumps the ingeniously minimal hopes of Rouault and Bernanos.

*Jazz Age Catholicism* ends with the inscription on the tomb of Tournemire, “*Per aspera, spera*,” Latin that, in its openness, is certainly limited by a modern translation. Let us try, “across [perhaps even, “because of”] the difficult things in life, hope on.” Otherwise there is no conclusion, no epilogue, no *envoi*; probably because all has been said. The work is richly evocative more than analytically neat. The corpus of fundamental categories out of Aristotelian Thomistic philosophy was stretched in two directions, backwards, to generality or token gesture, and forward, to utter fancy. Readers who once thought they knew hylomorphism, sacramentalism, and transubstantiation may find themselves reaching for the “Jazz Age” Dominican Antonin Sertillanges, or better the French historian of medieval Christian philosophy Étienne Gilson; for readers innocent of this great discussion, a quick trip to appropriate volumes of the F. C. Copleston *History of Philosophy* could help save the day.[9] But with Jacques Maritain at the center of the story, the center *does* hold. Schloesser has few peers when it comes to the biographical vignette and the oeuvre analysis of the major personalities in this history, and few peers when it comes to a command of French high culture, 1919-1933. So, although there are genuine structural (i.e., conceptual) extravagances to the book, readers are likely to be so beguiled by the poetic originality of the presentation, that they may not notice—or care.

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## NOTES

[1] Readers may wish to examine what the mid-twentieth-century philosopher of history, William Walsh, meant by a “colligatory concept,” the role of which is to 1) cover the facts and 2) illuminate the logical features of the data collected. For Walsh, the choice of the term would be an act of interpretation. See W. H. Walsh, “Colligatory Concepts in History,” in *The Philosophy of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Walsh was mentor to the eminent philosopher of history, William H. Dray, who examines the ambiguities of explanation by a label in his reflections on “Knowing What and Knowing Why.” See chapter 2 of his *History of Re-enactment: R. G. Collingwood’s Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 44-52. Obviously, if the identity of the concept changes across a narrative, its explanatory power is diminished correspondingly.

[2] Alfred Appel, Jr., *Jazz Modernism: From Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).

[3] Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994), offer plain talk on the problem. See chapter two, “Scientific History and the Idea of Modernity.”

[4] Austin Gough, *Paris and Rome: The Gallican Church and the Ultramontane Campaign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), is the essential text here.

[5] See Jean-Luc Barre, *Jacques and Raïssa Maritain: Beggars for Heaven*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) for a full historical account, and Jude P. Dougherty, *Jacques Maritain: An Intellectual Profile* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003) for a recent summary account of Maritain’s philosophical projects. Frédéric Gugelot, *La Conversion des intellectuels au catholicisme en France (1885-1935)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1998) is essential for a view of the conversion phenomenon. Gugelot offers a broad cast of (convert) characters, a chronology and



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geography of conversions, and a series of typologies: the ways of Catholic engagement—from the *lapsi* who were returning to atheists, the types of artistic and religious-vocation witnesses, the motives for conversion, and the relationships of the converts to one another. See also the study of Jacques and Raïssa Maritain as embodiments of a specific, time-bound interpretation of Christian suffering in Richard D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), chapter 4.

[6] On Ballanche, see Arthur McCalla, *Romantic Historiography: The Philosophy of History of Pierre-Simon Ballanche* (Boston: Brill, 1998). On regeneration in Grégoire, see Alyssa Goldstein Sepinwall, *The Abbé Grégoire and the French Revolution: The Making of Modern Universalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). For proto-Christian use of the term, note simply the Epistle to Titus, chapter 3, verse 5.

[7] In contrast, for a modern, intense philosophical engagement with Thomas's hylomorphism, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae 1a 75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[8] Maritain's subtle combination of moral exigency and fraternal gentleness is perhaps most clearly revealed in his relationship with Jean Cocteau. See Jean Cocteau et Jacques Maritain, *Correspondance (1923-1963)*, édition établie par Michel Bressolette et Pierre Glaudes (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

[9] See Antonin Sertillanges, *St. Thomas Aquinas and his Work*, trans. Godfrey Anstruther, 1st French edition 1931 (London: Blackfriars, 1957), Étienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 6th French edition trans. Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer, 1st edition 1910 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2002), and F. C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 *Greece and Rome, from the Pre-Socratics to Plotinus* and vol. 2 *Medieval Philosophy from Augustine to Duns Scotus*, 1st editions 1946 (New York: Doubleday, 1993).

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